



**1. What is the current situation for Christians in Syria, in particular Homs, following the recent uprisings, including whether Christians are the targets of anti-Assad protesters?**

Reports were located of Christians being targeted by ‘rebels’, ‘armed Islamists’, Syrian security forces and ‘regime-backed gangs’. Some reports, however, indicate that Christians have experienced casualties and displacement due to general violence in the country, rather than being attacked because they are Christian. While no reports were found of Christians specifically being targeted by anti-Assad protesters, sources indicate there is a fear among the Christian community that the fall of the Assad government could leave them vulnerable. A 30 March 2012 *Washington Post* article stated that ‘[r]eligious minorities worry that if the Sunni majority came to power, Syria could become a repressive Islamic state’.<sup>1</sup> The *LA Times* similarly reported on 7 March 2012 that:

Many here fear revenge attacks against minorities, who helped buttress four decades of repressive rule by the Assad family, and the emergence of what they describe as a new dictatorship by the Sunni Muslim majority.<sup>2</sup>

However, the report also notes that ‘not all of Syria’s Christians back Assad’ and many do not fear the anti-Assad protesters:

Abdu [a 27-year-old Christian activist who has taken part in numerous antigovernment demonstrations] is not afraid of a government dominated by Sunnis. He said he has often prayed in mosques, because that is where protesters gather before a demonstration. “We were very welcome there,” he said.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, a report in *The National*<sup>4</sup> on 8 April 2012 noted that ‘[m]any leading opposition activists – including protest organisers – are drawn from Syria’s Druze, Christian, Alawite and Ismaili minority communities’.<sup>5</sup>

Below is a list of reports of Christians being targeted for violence by various groups. Some of these reports state that Christian have been targeted, while others suggest they have been casualties of ongoing fighting between anti-Assad protesters and Syrian security forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Fadel, L. 2011 ‘In Syria, many uneasy about where power struggle could lead’, *The Washington Post*, 30 March <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrian-president-accepts-cabinets-resignations/2011/03/29/AFVTAjuB\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrian-president-accepts-cabinets-resignations/2011/03/29/AFVTAjuB_story.html)> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>2</sup> Zaviz, A. 2012 ‘Syria Christians fear life after Assad’, *LA Times*, 7 March <<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/mar/07/world/la-fg-syria-christians-20120307>> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>3</sup> Zaviz, A. 2012 ‘Syria Christians fear life after Assad’, *LA Times*, 7 March <<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/mar/07/world/la-fg-syria-christians-20120307>> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>4</sup> *The National* is a United Arab Emirates news agency owned by the Abu Dhabi Media company.

<sup>5</sup> Sands, P. 2012 ‘Disaffection, fear growing among Syria’s Alawites’, *The National*, 8 April <<http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/disaffection-fear-growing-among-syrias-alawites#full>> Accessed 16 April 2012

- *Fides*, the official Vatican news agency, has published conflicting reporting on Christians being affected by violence in Homs. A *Fides* article from 21 March 2012 states that '[m]ilitant armed Islamists... have managed to expel 90% of Christians in Homs and confiscated their homes by force'.<sup>6</sup> Two articles were located that dispute the claims made by *Fides*, describing them 'disinformation' and 'propaganda'.<sup>7</sup> In an about-turn, *Fides* published another article five days later quoting members of the Jesuit community in Homs, who state: 'the Christians in the city of Homs have not been threatened and forced to flee their homes'.<sup>8</sup> The article states that Christians 'have left the area and fled on their own initiative because of fear and conflict and were not forced to leave their homes because of threats on behalf of Islamist militia'.<sup>9</sup>
- The *Irish Times* reported on 19 March 2012 that Christians have been targeted for violence in the northern city of Aleppo. The article states that '[s]ources in Aleppo have reported rebel activity north of the city and Christians have said churches have been attacked'.<sup>10</sup> The report also states that a car bomber targeted 'security headquarters in a Christian district' of Aleppo, 'killing three and wounding 30'.<sup>11</sup>
- A *CBS News* article published on 6 February 2012 states that a small Christian community in the town of Qatana, west of Damascus, 'is supportive of the army's current operation to surround the town' following 'months of intermittent anti-regime protests there'.<sup>12</sup> The article also states that throughout Syria, 'regime-backed gangs have reportedly been shooting into the air around Christian neighborhoods since the early days of the revolt many believe in order to drive them into the hands of the authorities'.<sup>13</sup>
- Two reports from February and March 2012 state that a convent in the Christian town of Saidnaya was damaged by an unexploded shell.<sup>14</sup> While *CBS News* reported on

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<sup>6</sup> 'Abuse of the opposition forces, "ethnic cleansing" of Christians in Homs, where Jesuits remains' 2012, *Fides*, 21 March <<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=31228&lan=eng>> Accessed 16 April 2012

<sup>7</sup> "'Ethnic cleansing of Christians in Syria" facts and propaganda' 2012, *Syrian Christians for Democracy*, 22 March <<http://us4.campaign-archive1.com/?u=38d216ea5847d5e10a7194f62&id=c5268673a8>> Accessed 16 April 2012 ; Al-Tamini, A.J., Svadkovsky, O. & Smyth, P. 2012 'Syrian disinformation about Christian persecution', *Haaretz*, 6 April <<http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/syrian-disinformation-about-christian-persecution-1.422943>> Accessed 16 April 2012

<sup>8</sup> 'The Jesuits: "Christians have fled from Homs, not thrown out by Islamists"' 2012, *Fides*, 26 March <<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=31262&lan=eng>> Accessed 16 April 2012

<sup>9</sup> 'The Jesuits: "Christians have fled from Homs, not thrown out by Islamists"' 2012, *Fides*, 26 March <<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=31262&lan=eng>> Accessed 16 April 2012

<sup>10</sup> Jansen, M. 2012 'Bombings kill 30 in Syria as Christian districts targeted', *Irish Times*, 19 March <<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2012/0319/1224313527837.html>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>11</sup> Jansen, M. 2012 'Bombings kill 30 in Syria as Christian districts targeted', *Irish Times*, 19 March <<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2012/0319/1224313527837.html>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>12</sup> 'Syria's Christians stand by Assad' 2012, *CBS News*, 6 February <[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543\\_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/)> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>13</sup> 'Syria's Christians stand by Assad' 2012, *CBS News*, 6 February <[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543\\_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/)> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>14</sup> 'Syria's Christians stand by Assad' 2012, *CBS News*, 6 February <[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543\\_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/)> Accessed 12 April 2012 ; 'Habash, K. 2012 'Syria One Year After the Beginning of the Revolution', *New Socialist*, 19 March <[http://www.newsocialist.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=602:syria-one-year-after-the-beginning-of-the-revolution&catid=51:analysis&Itemid=98](http://www.newsocialist.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=602:syria-one-year-after-the-beginning-of-the-revolution&catid=51:analysis&Itemid=98)> Accessed 16 April 2012

6 February that '[n]o group has claimed responsibility for the attack',<sup>15</sup> *New Socialist* attributed the attack to 'Syrian forces' in their 19 March report.<sup>16</sup>

Two reports were located indicating that the volatile security situation has impeded the Christian community's ability to publically practice their religion, with 2012 Easter celebrations in Homs being disrupted. On 9 April 2012, the *Irish Independent* reported that 'no services were held to mark the festival of Easter' in Homs. The report states:

The three principal churches for Christian denominations in the city [of Homs], which until a few months ago was home to Syria's third-largest Christian community, were virtually abandoned. Other small churches have been destroyed as private homes became the places of worship on Sunday with priests and locals gathering in secret.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, a blog published by *CNN* on 7 April 2012 quotes Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute<sup>18</sup>, who states:

"In the past, they [Syrian Christians] have had great outpouring of piety in the public squares on Easter... This time, I suspect it is going to be vastly different. They are fearful... In Syria, it is a time when Christian [sic] are packing their suitcases or thinking about packing their suitcase and definitely are going to be lying low this Easter season."<sup>19</sup>

*Country Advice SYR39738* (dated 30 January 2012)<sup>20</sup> and *Country Advice SYR40001* (dated 28 February 2012)<sup>21</sup> both cover the recent situation for Christians in Syria.

## 2. Is there any reporting on people (especially Christians) who owe money to anyone with links to the Assad government?

No information was found about Christians who owe money to anyone linked to the Assad government.

One report was located discussing the ways that some Syrian people are profiting from the uprising by loaning money. The *Reuters* article, dated 21 March 2012, quotes a man whose father borrowed money from a 'loan shark', stating, 'I was so surprised at how organized it was, and how he had official papers... Everyone is having to take out these loans now and the lenders are working openly while the police are distracted.'<sup>22</sup> The article did not refer to

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<sup>15</sup> 'Syria's Christians stand by Assad' 2012, *CBS News*, 6 February <[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543\\_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-57372175-503543/syrias-christians-stand-by-assad/)> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>16</sup> 'Habash, K. 2012 'Syria One Year After the Beginning of the Revolution', *New Socialist*, 19 March <[http://www.newsocialist.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=602:syria-one-year-after-the-beginning-of-the-revolution&catid=51:analysis&Itemid=98](http://www.newsocialist.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=602:syria-one-year-after-the-beginning-of-the-revolution&catid=51:analysis&Itemid=98)> Accessed 16 April 2012

<sup>17</sup> Sherlock, R. 2012 'Syrian peace bid in tatters after new wave of violence', *Irish Independent*, 9 April <<http://www.independent.ie/world-news/middle-east/syrian-peace-bid-in-tatters-after-new-wave-of-violence-3074584.html>> Accessed 11 April 2012

<sup>18</sup> The Hudson Institute describes itself as a 'nonpartisan policy research organization', and is based in New York and Washington.

<sup>19</sup> Merica, D. 2012 'After Arab Spring, experts fearful of Christian targeting at Easter celebrations', *CNN*, 7 April <<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/04/07/after-arab-spring-experts-fearful-of-christian-targeting-at-easter-celebrations/>> Accessed 11 April 2012

<sup>20</sup> RRT Country Advice 2012, *Country Advice SYR39738*, 30 January

<sup>21</sup> RRT Country Advice 2012, *Country Advice SYR40001*, 28 February

<sup>22</sup> Holmes, O. 2012 'Entrepreneurs exploit economics of Syria uprising', *Reuters*, 21 March <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/21/us-syria-business-idUSBRE82K0WX20120321>> Accessed 12 April 2012

lenders having any links to the Assad government or what the consequences would be if the loan was not repaid.

The 2011 United States Department of State *Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Syria* provided general commentary on corruption in the Syrian government. The report noted that '[c]orruption continued to be a pervasive problem in the police forces and security services' and that many officials engaged in 'corrupt practices with impunity'.<sup>23</sup> Syria is ranked 129 out of 182 on the 2011 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> United States Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Syria*, 8 April <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160478.pdf>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>24</sup> Transparency International 2011, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2011*, November <<http://www.transparency.org/content/download/64426/1030807>> Accessed 12 April 2012

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